

Big Jacks Creek Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 54,833 acres

The Big Jacks Creek WSA (ID-111-7C) is in Owyhee County about 70 miles southeast of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 54,833 acres of BLM lands, two state inholdings totaling 1,280 acres and two private inholdings totaling 160 acres (see Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the west by an underground natural pipeline and associated primitive service roads. Most of the remainder of the WSA is bordered by primitive dirt roads. One short cherry-stem road (.75 mile) enters the southern part of the area.

The WSA consists of a major canyon system and the surrounding sagebrush- and grass-covered plateau. Big Jacks Creek Canyon and six major tributary canyons create more than 50 miles of rugged, spectacular chasms radiating throughout the WSA. Canyon features range from broad 700-foot deep V-shaped canyons to narrow grotto-like enclosures. Thirty-five miles of perennial streams wind through the canyons. The tributary canyons divide much of the surrounding plateau into narrow fingers of high desert sagebrush/grasslands.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Management Framework Plan (MFP) for the Bruneau Resource Area finalized in March 1983. The recommendation for wilderness generated through this planning process was evaluated in the Jacks Creek Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in July 1989. Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a partial wilderness alternative where 44,525 acres would be designated as wilderness and 10,308 acres released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; no wilderness and all wilderness alternatives; and two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 49,875 acres and 10,800 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 4,958, and 44,033 acres would be released for other uses, respectively.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

44,525 acres recommended for wilderness

10,308 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Big Jacks Creek WSA is to designate 44,525 acres as wilderness and to release 10,308 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 44,525 acres of federal land recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the Big Jacks Creek Proposal map. This recommendation for wilderness would further apply to any additional inholding acreage if acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Appendix I lists all inholdings within the area recommended for wilderness designation and provides additional information on acquisition of these lands.

The 44,525 acres recommended for wilderness would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of more than 50 miles of spectacularly scenic canyons and surrounding 33,725 acres of the plateau within 70 miles of Boise, Idaho. The area offers outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude within a natural setting. It provides habitat for an expanding population of California bighorn sheep, a wildland-dependent species. Although designation of the area as wilderness would not add a new ecosystem to the wilderness system, it would add over 5,800 acres of sagebrush- and grass-covered plateau in good to excellent ecological condition. More than 95 percent of the riparian areas are also in good ecological condition.

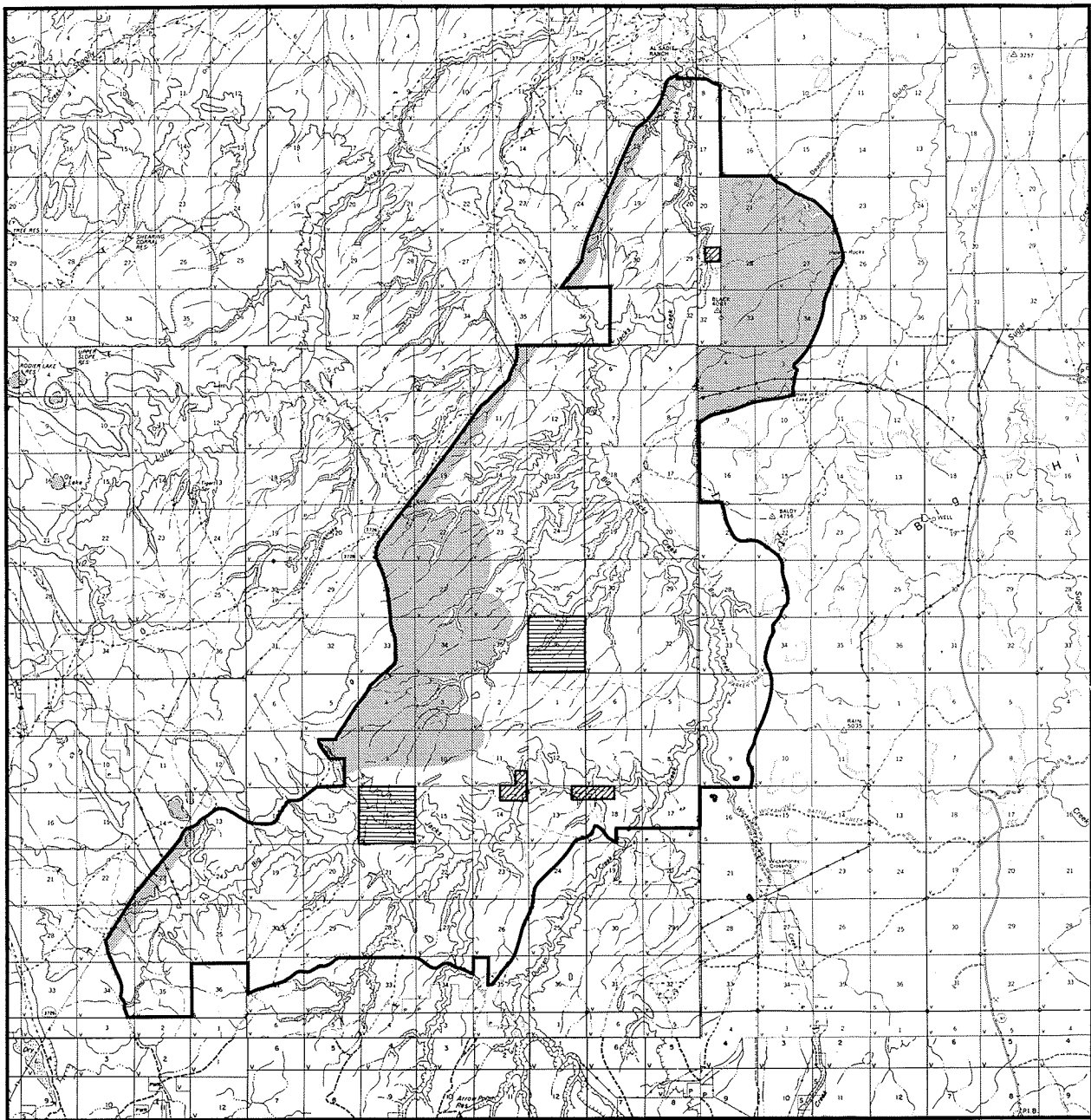
The area recommended for wilderness is of low mineral resource potential and contains no mining claims or leases. The area can be managed in the long term to protect and maintain its wilderness characteristics. Wilderness designation of 44,525 acres of BLM land would provide long-term protection to California bighorn sheep habitat and to an exceptionally scenic area with outstanding wilderness values.

The 10,308 acres of BLM land not recommended for wilderness are shown as shaded Areas A through C on Map 1. Although the areas have wilderness values, they are recommended for nonwilderness uses for the following reasons:

AREA A: About 4,000 acres on the northeast corner of the WSA. This flat to gently sloping plateau between Big Jacks Creek Canyon and the WSA's eastern boundary road contains few topographic, vegetative or soil barriers to discourage off-road vehicle use. Areas adjacent to this side of the WSA are used for desert motorcycle races and dispersed cross-country motorcycle use. The open, low-lying terrain would make it difficult to enforce vehicle use restrictions if this area was designated wilderness. Unintentional violations of these regulations would occur. The wilderness boundary created by eliminating this area would be clearly defined by a radical change in topography and would not require a management presence to discourage or prevent unauthorized vehicle use.

AREA B: About 5,000 acres of the plateau west of Big Jacks Creek Canyon. This portion of the WSA is not recommended for wilderness to allow construction of an additional 4.5 miles of laterals on the proposed 19-mile Jacks Creek livestock watering pipeline. These laterals would result in an additional 797 AUMs of livestock use. Deletion of this area is not expected to diminish overall opportunities for solitude/primitive recreation in the wilderness area. None of the area recommended for nonwilderness is within bighorn sheep habitat area.







AREA C: About 1,000 acres adjacent to the natural gas pipeline that separates Little Jacks Creek and Big Jacks Creek WSAs. Recommending this area for nonwilderness would allow for a .75-mile wide corridor between the proposed Big Jacks Creek and Little Jacks Creek wilderness areas to accommodate future underground utility right-of-way needs. Underground utility line construction would adversely impact naturalness and motorized vehicles and equipment would be needed for construction and maintenance.

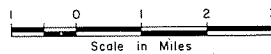


R.2 E. | R.3 E.

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R.4 E. | R.5 E.

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|---|--|
|  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  SPLIT ESTATE |
|  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  STATE |
|  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  PRIVATE |



ID-111-7C
BIG JACKS CREEK
PROPOSAL

FEBRUARY 1989

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**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
BIG JACKS CREEK WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	54,833
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	1,440
Total	56,273

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	44,525
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	44,525
Inholdings (state, private) ¹	1,560
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	10,308
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	10,308
Inholdings (state, private)	0

¹Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings included within the area recommended for designation.

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Big Jacks Creek WSA consists of a major canyon system and surrounding plateau. Numerous wildlife species including California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, sage grouse, mountain quail, raptors and redband trout are found in the area. The WSA is predominantly natural with negligible human impacts. Signs of man are four small livestock water developments, 2.5 miles of fence, .75 mile of cherry-stem road, and 19 miles of primitive vehicle routes (ways).

B. Solitude

Opportunities for solitude are outstanding in the WSA because of its large size and excellent vegetative and topographic screening in the canyons.

The best opportunities for solitude are found in the 50-plus miles of rugged canyons that radiate throughout the WSA. Topographic and vegetative screening within the canyons is excellent. The canyon walls, irregular talus slopes, rock pinnacles and dense riparian vegetation provide an effective visual and auditory barrier between groups. Visual contact between groups usually is not possible at distances of more than .25 mile.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude are also found on the plateaus. The spaciousness of the flat to rolling plateaus combined with ample sagebrush provide numerous opportunities for solitude.

Low elevation flights by military aircraft occasionally disrupt solitude throughout the WSA. The entire southwest corner of Idaho is used for training military pilots in subsonic low elevation flight. Disruptions are usually brief, although occasionally aircraft can be seen or heard throughout the day.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Big Jacks Creek WSA has outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation because of its 50-plus miles of spectacular canyons, its broad landform diversity, 35 miles of perennial stream with good trout fishing and because of frequent opportunities to view wildlife, including California bighorn sheep.

The canyons are the primary recreational attraction of the area. The highly eroded canyon system contains a wide variety of canyon types ranging from 700-foot deep broad open canyons with expansive vistas to narrow, winding grotto-like tributary canyons with precipitous walls that entirely block sunlight.

Mobility is enhanced by the radiating configuration of the canyon tributaries which provide scenic routes to most portions of the Big Jacks Creek WSA. Mobility is excellent in most portions of canyons but is sometimes hampered by heavy riparian vegetation in the narrow canyon bottoms. These obstacles, however, are not insurmountable and present a physical challenge that can be an important element in the visitor's wilderness experience.

Fishing is good in the 35 miles of perennial streams. The most common game fish is redband trout, a desert-adapted trout species.

Visitors can be expected not only in the miles of stream canyons but also along the plateau rims where vistas are commonplace. In contrast to the rugged, angular forms of the canyons, the surrounding plateau is characterized by gentle terrain and low, rounded forms. These contrasting landforms provide a strong recreational attraction that each alone would not have.

A growing attraction are the near-pristine sagebrush/grasslands that separate Little Jacks Creek and Big Jacks Creek canyons. In these areas, stands of perennial grasses have obscured the usually dominant sagebrush. They are a stark contrast to the sagebrush-dominated plains that now characterize most of the high desert throughout the west.

D. Special Features

The WSA includes 35 miles of redband trout habitat. This desert-adapted trout species is found only in southern Idaho, eastern Oregon and northern Nevada. Because of its limited range, the fish has been classified as a sensitive species.

Mountain quail is another sensitive species found in the canyons of Big Jacks Creek WSA. Little information is known about these native quail except that their population numbers have declined dramatically since the 1950s.

In 1988, 40 California bighorn sheep were reintroduced into the WSA. California bighorn sheep in Owyhee County account for about ten percent of the world's known population. All of the Owyhee County populations and most of the U.S. populations are the result of reintroduction. Because of their relative intolerance to the presence of humans, California bighorn sheep are a wildlands- or wilderness-dependent species. They are classified as a sensitive species by BLM and Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Two sensitive plant species, *Pediocactus simpsonii* var. *robustior* and *Lepidium davisii*, are found in the WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the Big Jacks Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform and vegetative type not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
	<u>NEVADA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
	<u>OREGON</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Big Jacks Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3
**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Big Jacks Creek WSA would add to the geographical distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon and plateau area not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

Manageability

The portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation can be managed in the long term to protect and maintain its wilderness characteristics and values. The proposed wilderness area does include three private inholdings. Providing access to these inholdings would not have a significant impact on wilderness characteristics or values. A 120 acre private parcel is located within the proposed wilderness on a cherry-stem road. There are no plans to close this road unless the property is acquired through exchange. The three inconspicuous livestock water improvements are already serviced by primitive vehicle routes (ways). Rough topography and rocky soils would prevent or discourage motorized vehicle use in the vast majority of the area.

About 4,000 acres on the northeast corner of the WSA (Area A) would be difficult to manage in the long term as wilderness. This flat to gently sloping plateau between Big Jacks Creek Canyon and the WSA's eastern boundary road contains few topographic, vegetative or soil barriers to discourage or prevent unauthorized motor vehicle use.

There are no significant wilderness manageability problems anticipated in the remaining portions of the WSA.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) completed a mineral assessment for 49,875 acres of the Big Jacks Creek WSA in 1987.

Investigations conducted by the USGS and BM revealed no identified minerals and a low mineral resource potential for metals, oil and gas, and geothermal energy.

No mines, prospects, mineralized areas, patented mining claims or mineral leases were identified in the WSA. Sand, gravel and industrial rock resources are present but sufficient quantities are available elsewhere to satisfy current local needs.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4

**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA ID-111-7C (BIG JACKS CREEK)**

Issue Topics	No Wilderness/No Action Alternative)	All Manageable Wilderness Alternative	Rim To Rim Wilderness Alternative
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>NONWILDERNESS (54,833 acres) Naturalness would be lost on 5,350 acres. Underground utility construction could reduce naturalness of another 550 acres. Outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation could be diminished on 9,750 acres. 19 miles of redband trout habitat would improve but another 3 miles would decline in condition. Scientific/ecological values could be diminished on 11,300 acres of good condition sagebrush steppe rangeland. The bighorn sheep population would expand and fully occupy available habitat.</p>	<p>WILDERNESS (49,875 acres) Naturalness and opportunities for solitude/primitive recreation would be enhanced on about 200 acres. About 19 miles of redband trout habitat would benefit from improved riparian condition. Scientific values could be diminished on 5,800 acres of good condition rangeland. The bighorn sheep population would expand and fully occupy available habitat.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS (4,958 acres) Underground utility construction could reduce naturalness on about 550 acres. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation could be diminished on about 4,400 acres affected by increased ORV use.</p>	<p>WILDERNESS (10,800 acres) About 19 miles of redband trout habitat would benefit from improved riparian condition. Another 3 miles of redband habitat would decline in condition. The bighorn sheep population would expand and fully occupy available habitat.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS (44,033 acres) Naturalness would be lost on 5,350 acres. Outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be diminished on 9,750 acres. Underground utility construction could also reduce naturalness on another 550 acres. Scientific/ecological values could be diminished on 11,300 acres of good condition sagebrush steppe rangeland. The bighorn sheep population would expand and fully occupy available habitat.</p>
Impacts on Recreation Use	<p>NONWILDERNESS Annual recreation use would be 3,665 visitor days, an increase of 2,915 annual visitor days over current use. Major use areas would be Big Jacks Creek Canyon with use about 75% nonhunting and 25% hunting. Opportunities to participate in ORV use or hunting would not be affected.</p>	<p>WILDERNESS Same as the Proposed Action.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS No significant impact.</p>	<p>WILDERNESS Same as the Proposed Action.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS No significant impact.</p>
Impacts of Creek Pipeline Extensions (continued on next page)	<p>NONWILDERNESS Naturalness would be lost and opportunities for solitude/primitive recreation diminished on 5,350 acres. Scientific values (supplemental wilderness values) could be diminished on 4,400 acres of good condition rangeland affected by increased livestock grazing. 3 miles of redband trout habitat would decline in condition. There</p>	<p>WILDERNESS No impact.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS No impact.</p>	<p>WILDERNESS Same as the Proposed Action.</p> <p>NONWILDERNESS Same as the Proposed Action.</p>

Issue Topics	No Wilderness/No Action Alternative)	All Manageable Wilderness Alternative	Rim To Rim Wilderness Alternative
Impacts of Creek Pipeline Extensions (continued)(Big Jacks Creek WSA)	would be a slight improvement in wildlife habitat.		
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Species	NONWILDERNESS Same as Proposed Action.	WILDERNESS Same as Proposed Action. NONWILDERNESS Mule deer, pronghorn and sage grouse would remain stable.	WILDERNESS Mule deer, pronghorn and sage grouse populations would re- main stable. NONWILDERNESS Same as Proposed Action.
Impacts on Income and Jobs	NONWILDERNESS There would be \$96,812 of ad- ditional annual income and 7.1 new jobs. Implementation costs would total \$63,850 for range improvements.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS There would be \$182,110 of ad- ditional annual income and 16 new jobs. Implementation costs would total \$48,100 for range improvements and \$4,500 an- nually wilderness management.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS There would be \$196,933 of ad- ditional annual income and 16.35 new jobs. Implementation costs would total \$63,850 for range improvements and \$4,500 annually for wilderness management.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of the entire Big Jacks Creek WSA or any portion of the WSA as wilderness would have no significant social or economic effects on Owyhee County.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During the wilderness inventory for the Big Jacks Creek roadless unit, 18 public commenters supported establishing a WSA and 23 opposed it. Reasons cited among those who supported establishment of a WSA were the area's spectacular scenery (seven comments), abundance of wildlife (six comments), outstanding hiking opportunities in the canyons (five comments), and large size (four comments). Those opposed to designation of the WSA cited the area is crossed by numerous roads (23 comments); the area has been proposed for a livestock watering pipeline (20 comments); water developments and fences preclude naturalness (17 comments); solitude is disrupted by frequent U.S. Air Force jet flights (nine comments); and the area is too open, hot and dry for recreation use (five comments).

During the public review of the Bruneau MFP, 72 out of 76 comments supported wilderness designation. Proponents of wilderness cited the following reasons: bighorn sheep habitat (27 comments), ecological values of relatively undisturbed vegetation communities (12 comments), wildlife habitat (nine comments), quality of wilderness characteristics (nine comments), redband trout habitat (four comments), and opportunities for primitive recreation (three comments).

During the public review of the Draft Jacks Creek Wilderness EIS, 151 written and oral comments addressing this WSA were received. Public hearings were held in Boise and Grand View, Idaho. Eighty-five commenters supported wilderness designation for all or a portion of the WSA, 40 commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA, while 26 commenters took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Among those supporting wilderness, 80 percent were Idaho residents with a majority from Ada County; 12 percent were from other western states; and eight percent were residents of eastern states. By far the most prevalent reason cited for wilderness designation was preservation of wildlife habitat, particularly California bighorn sheep habitat. The second most frequently cited reason for supporting wilderness designation was protection of pristine high desert ecosystems. Other reasons in support of wilderness were to provide primitive recreation opportunities and solitude; to preserve scenic quality; the proximity to Boise, Idaho; and to maximize protection of fisheries and riparian habitat. Twelve wilderness supporters pointed out that wilderness designation would have minimal resource conflicts with other resource uses.

About 85 percent of the comments opposing wilderness designation were from local residents with about 40 percent from Owyhee County, 35 percent from Ada County, and ten percent from Canyon and Elmore Counties. The remaining 15 percent were from residents of other western states. Twenty-two of these commenters believe that wilderness designation would discriminate against senior citizens and the handicapped. Other reasons for opposing wilderness were bighorn sheep do not need wilderness, wilderness is not effective management (too inflexible and costly), wilderness is not multiple use, Idaho has enough wilderness, wilderness values do not need wilderness designation for protection, wilderness would close the door to future oil and gas exploration work.

Several agencies commented on the Draft EIS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Air Force and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed designation. The Federal Aviation Agency and the Idaho State Historical Society did not express an alternative preference.

APPENDIX I -- BIG JACKS CREEK WSA
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings
Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 9 S., R. 3 E. Sec. 36	640	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,400
Parcel No. 2 T. 10 S., R. 3 E. Sec. 16	640	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,400
Parcel No. 3 T. 8 S., R. 4 E. Sec. 29 SW1/4NE1/4	40	1	Private	Private	No	Exchange	N/A	2,000
Parcel No. 4 T. 10 S., R. 3 E. Sec. 11 SE1/4SE1/4 Sec. 14 N1/2NE1/4	120	1	Private	Private	No	Exchange	N/A	5,000
Parcel No. 5 T. 10 S., R. 3 E. Sec. 13 NE1/4NE1/4 T. 10 S., R. 4 E. Sec. 18 N1/2NW1/4	120	1	Private	Private	No	Exchange	N/A	5,000

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.